

Even the liberal ACLU, which used to care about individual rights and transparency, is prioritizing woke bureaucrats ahead of middle-class parents. Here was the ACLU's statement:

Curriculum transparency bills are just thinly veiled attempts at chilling teachers and students from learning and talking about race and gender in schools.

So let's think about that for a minute. The far left is admitting in public that if the public gets to look at the racial and gender theories that they want to teach little kids, then those lesson plans will become untenable.

I am going to say that again. The far left is admitting in public that if the public gets a look at the racial and gender theories that they want to teach little kids, then these lesson plans will become untenable.

That is what they are actually saying. If parents gain transparency into the crazy stuff we are teaching, we might have to stop teaching it.

In other words, their reaction proves the point. The fact that woke bureaucrats are this terrified by transparency proves exactly—exactly—why parents deserve it.

Bear in mind, these same people are passionate supporters of a sweeping toddler takeover that would give Federal bureaucrats huge new powers to shape early childhood across America and discriminate against religious daycares.

The choice before American families is actually pretty stark. On the one hand, an alliance between Big Labor, woke bureaucrats, and many elected Democrats apparently wants indefinitely masked children being taught radical nonsense while parents are pushed to the sidelines. But Republicans at the local, State, and national levels are standing up for science, for common sense, and for the children's best interests. The party of parents has your back.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, over the last 12 months, the economy has rebounded at levels that we have not seen in decades—a 5.7-percent GDP growth rate and 6.6 million new jobs. This is the fastest our economy has grown since, perhaps, 1984, and the new jobs we added to the economy were the most ever for a President's first year.

After former President Trump botched our national response to COVID, America is now on the right track under President Biden, but we

face serious challenges that demand action from Congress. The cost of living has come up for families across the country and around the world. The destruction unleashed by COVID has decimated supply chains, strained the labor supply, and the effects of a global pandemic that began 2 years ago still reverberate today. These challenges demand action, and Democrats remain laser-focused on lowering costs for American families.

Yesterday, our caucus met for our weekly lunch, where we held a spirited, enthusiastic discussion about ideas from our Members of how we can lower costs and take action to do so. We talked about how we can continue working to lower childcare costs, prescription drug costs, the costs of semiconductors, which is a huge driver of price increases across a wide variety of products, and things as basic and vital as the cost of food and meat.

Lowering costs will continue to be a caucuswide effort. We are not going to agree on everything, but we are all on the same page in that we need to tackle the issue head on.

That is the difference between Democrats and Republicans. Rising costs, of course, impact all of us, whether we come from blue or red States, but Democrats are the ones laser-focused on showing where we stand and in offering solutions that aim squarely at the problem. Republicans seem to have no solutions, just rhetoric. The other side, sadly, seems, oftentimes, motivated by something else. Rather than working with us in a bipartisan spirit, our Republican colleagues seem more comfortable giving speeches that go on and on about rising costs without offering any solutions. Complaining about the problem doesn't make inflation better—proposing solutions does—and that is precisely what Democrats will continue focusing on.

Over the next month and beyond, Members from our side will continue offering a number of solutions—solutions—that will lower costs and leave more money in people's pockets. We need to help working families build wealth after the pandemic. We need to lower the costs of medications like insulin, which can still reach \$600 a month. We need to relieve our strained supply chains and increase domestic manufacturing on things like chips—and on that front, I am hopeful that we can take bipartisan action soon.

Our Republican colleagues, we hope, will join us in these efforts. Our Members would welcome it.

We have come a long way from the start of COVID, but we still have more to do. Democrats' goals are to make sure that the job creation and wage increases of last year carry into this year. We are going to keep working on that this spring, and I hope to see our colleagues from the other side work with us to improve the lives of the American people. If we can keep wages growing and get costs down, the average American will have more money in his or her pocket to live a better life.

FURTHER ADDITIONAL EXTENDING GOVERNMENT FUNDING ACT

Mr. President, on the CR, soon our Republican colleagues must come to an agreement with Democrats for passing a continuing resolution to keep the government open until March 11. This extension is necessary in order to give appropriators more time to arrive at an omnibus.

On the one hand, bipartisan negotiations on a yearlong spending bill continue to go well—a credit to everyone working on this issue from both sides of the aisle. I thank Chairman LEAHY, Ranking Member SHELBY, and my House colleagues.

On the other hand, right now, the thing we must do—the responsible thing to do—is to pass the CR before the deadline on Friday. Democrats are united in approving it just as it was approved with great bipartisan support in the House.

Nobody here wants a Republican government shutdown. I dare say Republicans prefer not to have a Republican shutdown, but for that to happen, Republicans must keep working with us on an agreement to move quickly on a CR. Democrats are working in good faith to reach a time agreement soon with our Republican colleagues. There is every reason in the world to arrive at an agreement quickly, so I urge my colleagues on the other side to keep working with us to get there.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on nominations, later today, the Senate is scheduled to advance and confirm a pair of critical Department of Defense nominees.

One of them is Celeste Wallander, nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. A veteran of the National Security Council, Ms. Wallander is one of our country's top Russian experts and a deeply experienced foreign policy adviser.

As tensions persist in Eastern Europe, Ms. Wallander's expertise is urgently needed, and her nomination must be approved as soon as possible. Frankly, it should have happened weeks ago, the moment she was reported out of committee with support from both sides, but Ms. Wallander has remained on hold because one Member of this body—just one Republican—has objected to her swift passage.

Intentionally delaying the confirmation of a qualified expert on Russian affairs at a time like this is supremely reckless and is making the American people less safe. For a Member of the Senate to insist on this hold is a clear risk to our national security, and it only serves to undermine our defense efforts. It is unacceptable and the definition of "cynical."

Let me say it again.

To intentionally delay the confirmation of a critical Department of Defense nominee and a Russian expert at a time when tensions persist in Ukraine and Eastern Europe is supremely reckless and is making the American people less safe.

But while this nominee has been delayed, she will nonetheless be confirmed by this Chamber. The vast majority of Senators understand that certain nominees are out of bounds from typical partisan politics. So we are going to do our jobs and confirm this nominee. As long as Republican holds continue on a vast number of other important nominations, the Senate will keep voting as long as it takes to get them through the Chamber. If it means voting late, as we have done in recent weeks, then that is what we must do.

I will return later to join with my colleagues to speak further on increasingly reckless holds—holds that damage our security, both domestic and national—that we are seeing on the other side.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, we are currently in the midst of the worst border crisis in our Nation's history.

It is no exaggeration to say that the situation at our southern border is out of control. In December, U.S. Customs and Border Protection apprehended more than 178,000 individuals attempting to cross our southern border illegally—178,000 in 1 month—which is more than double the number of individuals apprehended by the Border Patrol the previous December.

This is no isolated incident. Almost from the day the President took office, our Nation has been experiencing an unprecedented border surge. In fiscal year 2021, the Border Patrol encountered more than 1.7 million individuals attempting to cross our southern border—the highest number ever recorded.

The situation at our southern border is a security, enforcement, and humanitarian nightmare. Our Border Patrol officers have done heroic work this past year, but they are stretched incredibly thin and are having to spend too much time caring for migrants and not enough time patrolling the border. This heightens the chance that dangerous individuals—from terrorists to drug smugglers, to human traffickers—will slip across the border into the country unnoticed.

Drug trafficking across our southern border is a major problem and a problem that affects our entire country. There is a massive increase of fentanyl being smuggled across the border in States around the country, with total seizures up 134 percent and as high as 1,000 percent in South Texas. Alarmingly, fentanyl overdoses are now the leading cause of death for Americans aged 18 to 45.

I have talked with local law enforcement officials in South Dakota who report that they regularly seize drugs that they can trace back to cartels trafficking them across our southern border. In other words, it is not just border States that are affected by security problems at our borders. Every State in our Union is threatened by lax border security.

Addressing the situation at our southern border should be one of this administration's top priorities, but the President has been almost completely AWOL on this issue, as has his supposed border czar, the Vice President. He seems to be hoping that if he ignores this crisis long enough, it will go away. But it hasn't gone away. In fact, it shows no signs of stopping.

It is hard to overemphasize the depth of the President's dereliction of duty on this issue. After all, it is the President's job to deal with national security and border enforcement. Yet the President continues to do essentially nothing to address the situation at our southern border. He can't even be bothered to visit the border. In fact, there is reason to believe that the President has never, never visited the border—not as President, not as Vice President, and not even as a Senator—beyond driving by it once on the way to a campaign rally in 2008.

Of course, this situation isn't just a matter of the President being derelict in his enforcement duties. The President is partly, if not largely, responsible for the existence of this situation in the first place.

Immediately upon taking office, the President took steps that weakened our Nation's border security. On his very first day in office, the President rescinded the declaration of a national emergency at our southern border. He halted construction of the border wall, and he revoked a Trump administration order that called for the government to faithfully execute our immigration laws. That was all on his first day, and that wasn't all.

The President's Department of Homeland Security also issued guidelines that same day pausing deportations except under certain conditions. The effect of all this was to declare to the world that the U.S. borders were effectively open, and the administration hasn't made much of an effort to correct that impression. The President has significantly limited the ability of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection to enforce immigration laws.

Deportations dropped precipitously during fiscal year 2021, as did arrests in the interior of the country. And, of course, having a President who seems untroubled by the massive number of migrants attempting to cross our borders illegally hardly sends a discouraging message to those contemplating making the crossing themselves.

There is simply nothing good to say about President Biden's record on the border so far. His policies are not com-

passionate. There is nothing compassionate about policies that invite illegal immigration and encourage individuals to undertake the dangerous journey to our southern border.

He has betrayed the duty he owes to the American people who should be able to count on their President to care about security concerns, including border security.

We just marked the anniversary of the President's first year in the White House, a year marked by disaster at our southern border. The President has a chance to change that record, to leave behind something other than border chaos to mark his time in office. But until we see real action from this administration, I am not going to get my hopes up.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RUSSIA

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, as I speak here today, Russian President Vladimir Putin has amassed 130,000 to 150,000 soldiers on Ukraine's doorstep in a show of force that could be a dress rehearsal for an invasion of Ukraine. But Putin's inventory of tanks, infantry, and missiles is enabled by another dangerous weapon: Russia's export of dirty energy, oil and gas.

Our global addiction to fossil fuels, an addiction which Russia is only too happy to exploit, is kindling this potential conflict. Without a worldwide clean energy revolution, we will never be able to quit this cycle of fossil fuel corruption and conflict. We will never be able to experience true independence from foreign interference. And we will never be able to protect our friends and our allies or ourselves from wars spurred by dirty energy profits.

As long as Vladimir Putin can wield natural gas and oil as a threat against our country and our European allies and partners, we will always be on the defense. As long as Putin can wield gas prices and oil prices as a cudgel to remake borders, these crises will become a repeating drumbeat on the battlefield of history. As long as Putin can rely on global economic systems that are dominated by dirty fossil fuels instead of clean renewable energy, we will all remain vulnerable.

The most effective way to reduce the long-term security threat to Ukraine and to Europe and to sovereign nations everywhere is to stop the spigot that puts billions of Euros and dollars into the hands of Vladimir Putin and his oligarch cronies in return for dirty fuels.

In 2021, more than 36 percent of Russia's Federal budget revenues came